DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 305 UD 034 171

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TITLE Southeastern Public Education Responds to Change in Hispanic Population, 1985-2000.

SPONS AGENCY American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.; Spencer Foundation, Chicago, IL.

PUB DATE 2001-04-00

NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; Diversity (Student); *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Hispanic American Students; Public Education

IDENTIFIERS Alabama; Florida; Georgia; *State Policy

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the history and current status of interactions between Hispanics and public education in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, where widespread Hispanic presence is primarily a recent development, focusing on regular and gifted education. Policy actions by state government and postsecondary institutions as well as the Hispanic community are included. Research methodology involved personal communication and literature review, with some primary and secondary documents providing additional detail. Results find that Alabama, Georgia, and Florida differ significantly in Hispanic population and by when their Hispanic population arrived. Despite these differences, state policy responses have been very similar in some ways. Within gifted education, all three states have expanded identification criteria to increase the participation of students from groups under-represented under previous rules that emphasized IQ scores. Florida and Alabama policies changed under threat of legal action, while Georgia policy changed without such pressure. Both Florida and Alabama have implemented a dual pathway into programs for the gifted. The states' Departments of Education have not been very responsive to the needs of minority students in gifted education. Postsecondary programs originating in state colleges and universities have responded more quickly to demographic shifts than programs run by the State Departments of Education. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

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ED 453 305

Running Head: SOUTHEASTERN EDUCATION RESPONDS TO CHANGE

# Southeastern public education responds to change in Hispanic population, 1985-2000

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 14, 2001.

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**Abstract**

This paper considers the history and current status of interactions between Hispanics and public education in a portion of the Southeast, where widespread Latino presence is primarily a recent development. The focus is on both regular and gifted education. Actions by state government and postsecondary institutions as well as the Hispanic community are included. Interaction is conceptualized as ideally a two-way process, which until very recently in these contexts has moved primarily from the educational establishment to the community. By considering all available information, it is possible to identify not only exemplary but also less effective examples of interaction. To construct effective education, not only must schools seek and welcome community input, but communities must also come to believe that providing such input is both their right and their duty.

## Introduction

Public education in the United States delegates the responsibility for many policy decisions to the state. Because state-level decisions have widespread influence, their study is helpful in learning about both the history and likely future trends in public education.

Recent research in gifted education has addressed state policies toward the inclusion of gifted students from special populations (Coleman & Gallagher, 1995) and addressed legislative and policy trends in relation to the recommendations set forth by the National Excellence Report on improving education for gifted students (Landrum, Katsiyannis, & DeWaard, 1998). Other research has addressed gifted education policy and underrepresented groups at the state and local level (cf. Irby, Lara-Alecio, & Perez Gabriel, 2000). Much recent scholarship has also been directed toward a variety of Latino experiences with education in the United States, particularly in locations characterized by long-standing Latino presence (cf. Valdés, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Zentella, 1997). Yet until very recently, little research has focused on Hispanics[1] in the Southeast.

The present study focuses on state policy responses to the rapid growth in Hispanic population that has taken place in the United States over the past fifteen years. Nationwide between 1990 and 2000, the number of individuals classified as Hispanic has increased by

[1] The term Hispanic is used by most US government agencies and the US Census Bureau to describe ethnicity, which as currently defined varies independently of race. In this paper I have tried to use Hispanic where the government uses this term, and elsewhere I use the term Latino. Losey (1995) has addressed the issue of terminology in greater detail; Census figures that include information on specific nationalities within the Hispanic population are scheduled for release this summer and continuing into 2002.

almost 13 million, or 57.9%, to 35,305,818 (Population by race and Hispanic or Latino origin for the United States: 1990 and 2000, 2001). Looked at another way, 14.2 percent of all United States residents consider themselves of Hispanic ethnicity (Many queries about census data can be addressed using the search program on the US Census Bureau web site, located at http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet).

This rapid Hispanic population growth has not been geographically uniform. Although the Census has not yet released all findings from the 2000 count, it is apparent that some areas have witnessed much more rapid change than others. The rate of change has been particularly evident in Georgia, for example, whereas it is several times lower in neighboring Alabama. Though a definitive answer lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is also hypothesized that educational responses in the Southeast might differ in as-yet undetermined ways from the policy developed in other regions of the United States where a Hispanic presence is long-standing.

## Methods

The initial queries sent out for this paper focused on the Southeast region, excluding Florida, because the Hispanic presence in these states has been a relatively recent phenomenon (i.e., only in the past five to fifteen years has there been any noticeable Hispanic presence). Although the time under study included the past fifteen years, no information was located about events prior to the 1990s. The methods of inquiry used in this paper have been primarily personal communication and literature review, with some primary and secondary documents used to provide additional detail. Future work on this topic would profit from the addition of archival source materials.

A general query (text in Appendix A) was posted to the Bilingual Education listserve (BILING@asu.edu) and to the National Association of State Associations for the Gifted listserve (NASAG@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu). Based on the responses received, the focus of this study was narrowed to primarily Georgia and Alabama; responses from other states consisted primarily of referrals rather than directly relevant information. Some information

about Florida was also received, and has been included as well. Approximately half a dozen people wrote in reply to these first queries; many suggested additional sources who were subsequently contacted individually by email. A few of these contacts responded, although as many more did not. Six weeks after the first two queries, a similar query was sent to the gifted coordinators of each school district in Georgia. One additional response was received as a result of this mailing.

The initial intent of this study was to focus on the relationship between educational policy and demographic change. Gifted education policy was given particular consideration because gifted (and related advanced) courses often serve a de facto gatekeeper role in admission to higher education. As such, gifted education policy can lead to consequences (both beneficial and harmful) that appear far removed from the decision about which students are to be involved in a particular program.

At first, policy change was conceptualized as occurring primarily within state departments of education. As more information arrived, it became apparent that responses made through postsecondary institutions within each state were also relevant.

A second goal of this investigation was to determine the degree to which the Latino community has (or has not) been involved in the process of change. Because immigration in the Southeast has been both recent and rapid, it was hypothesized that Latino communities in this region may not have had sufficient time to become as organized as could be the case elsewhere.

As a consequence of the author's location in Georgia and the particular persons who responded, information about Georgia policy is the most comprehensive. Response from Alabama was also very complete. Because Florida was not a part of the initial queries Florida data is less complete, although what was learned has been included because it was judged relevant to the topic.

## Results

### Alabama

#### Gifted Education Responses

Alabama gifted education policies have recently changed (Stephens & Karnes, 2000), apparently in response to legal challenge, but I have not been able to learn who else (in addition to the Office of Civil Rights) may have been responsible for this action. The challenge apparently arose from the observation that Black and Hispanic students were severely underrepresented[2] in Alabama's gifted education programs.

In accordance with the *Title VI Resolution Agreement* between the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE), local education agencies (LEAs) are now monitored to determine compliance with the terms of the agreement and with the requirements set forth in the *Alabama Administrative Code,* r., Chapter 290-8-9-.70. As of August 2000, schools are required to report numbers of eligible and served gifted program children, classified by racial and ethnic group, to the SDE. Compliance is also checked during regular monitoring visits, held every five years. All forms pertaining to the new requirements are available as .rtf–format documents at http://www.alsde.edu/, the Alabama Department of Education website. Group categories on these forms include White (non-Hispanic), Black (non-Hispanic), Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Under the new Alabama rules, some students may be automatically identified for gifted program participation through scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Verbal Average Standard Score or Figural Creativity Index at or above the 97$^{th}$ percentile) or through scoring at least two standard deviations above the mean on an individually administered intelligence test. Students not meeting the automatic identification criteria may still be placed; this second route to placement uses an identification matrix that incorporates

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[2] Landrum, Katsiyannis, and DeWaard (1998) reported state responses indicating minority participation rates of less than one to more than five percent, while overall participation in gifted programs ranged from less than three to more than ten percent.

criteria from aptitude tests, rating scales, and performance evaluation. One of the documents on the Alabama SDE website lists approved tests and their publishers.

As a whole, the new Alabama materials provide extremely detailed guidelines for local gifted programs. The attention thus focused toward achieving proportional representation for Hispanics and other underserved groups deserves commendation, although it is still too soon to judge the effectiveness of the new procedures.

There is little evidence of any other Alabama SDE response to an increase in the Hispanic population, although it should be noted that both the actual and percentage increases in Alabama are much smaller than in Georgia or Florida. Using the search engine provided on the Alabama State DOE web site, searches for "Hispanic" and "Latino" both failed to produce any matches.

**Postsecondary Responses**

The PACERS Small Schools Cooperative program is administered through the Program for Rural Services and Research of the University of Alabama. The program counts the School of Education, the English Department, and the Latin American Studies Program as partner groups within the University. Some of the information that follows is from the PACERS web site, http://www.pacers.org. Many specific details were kindly provided to me by the Hispanic Program Coordinator at PACERS, Hernán Prado.

PACERS ESL programs have grown out of work in Collinsville High School and its surrounding community, work that began in 1997 and has grown into a comprehensive statewide ESL plan. Program components provide support and encourage involvement of teachers/administrators, students, and the community in k-12 ESL education. Some of what follows is still under development or awaiting additional funding, a consequence of the rapid and ongoing expansion of the program.

Support offered to school personnel through the PACERS program is similar to the support that is available in Georgia (see below). Components include professional development through ESL certification courses and multicultural education awareness

workshops, establishment of regional and local ESL resource centers, and support for curriculum restructuring. Ten focused two-hour PowerPoint presentations have been designed specifically with the Alabama ESL population in mind. Titles include: ESL Policies and Law; First and Second Language Acquisition; ESL Strategies for Mainstream Teachers; and others. An Alabama–Mexico Teacher Exchange Program is also under development.

Student involvement is promoted through peer tutoring and after school tutoring programs, an ESL instruction laboratory and ESL summer school programs, and graduation and career awareness programs. Social activities, including school-published community bilingual news and a bilingual vocabulary video, also promote student involvement.

PACERS promotes community involvement through sponsoring adult ESL education, adult classes in Spanish language and literature, and an adult literacy program. The organization also assists in making available information about health and economic development issues to the Hispanic community.

In a more direct form of advocacy, PACERS personnel have also guided the formation of the Alabama Latin-American Association (ALAS). ALAS is an umbrella group that provides statewide advocacy and assistance in support of all Hispanic-related coalitions in Alabama. Ten local Hispanic coalitions across the state are formal members of ALAS.

## Georgia

### Developments in Gifted Education

The Georgia Department of Education web site (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/index, at over 7000 pages, is not only large but also boasts of being the most-visited state DOE web site. The state offers report cards on every public school and school system in the state, a resource that allows access to local and comparative information that can provide a quantitative basis from which to advocate for change.

Georgia's state Gifted Education Specialist, Sally Krisel, has tracked gifted program participation by racial or ethnic group for the past several years using the DOE web site and

other sources of information. She also visits schools across the state. Some locales have tried formal programs to increase the number of Hispanic students identified for gifted programs; for example, three years ago a district developed local norms (W. Heath, personal communication, April 3, 2001) for the well known Renzulli-Hartman behavior rating scale (Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, & Hartman, 1976). Other efforts have occurred at the individual teacher level, and as such have not attracted widespread notice.

Unlike Alabama or Florida, Georgia appears not to have been party to a lawsuit related to gifted education. This may be in part because Georgia gifted identification criteria were recently altered. Four years ago Georgia switched from IQ-only to an identification policy relying on multiple criteria, in an effort to promote more equitable access to gifted programs (Krisel & Cowan, 1997). Creativity, achievement, and motivation criteria were added to the aptitude measures already in use. The new rules and information on their interpretation and implementation are available on the Georgia DOE website (Georgia Department of Education, 2000).

Although some progress has occurred since these changes took effect, there is still room for improvement. For example, 1.38% of Hispanic and 1.76% of Black students participated in gifted programs in Georgia during the spring of 2000 (Office of Technology Services, 2000). By comparison, at the same time more than ten percent of both White and Asian students in Georgia took part in these programs. Given these figures, it seems surprising that there has not been more pressure for change from community members.

**Other State-level Responses**

Searching the Georgia DOE website for the term "Hispanic" yields forty-one results. Some of these matches are for programs that relate specifically to Hispanic students, although most reflect only isolated occurrences of the term. The four programs that are related (however tenuously) to the needs of Hispanic students are detailed below.

The Student Exchange Program is a cooperative agreement between the Georgia DOE and the government of Spain. Georgia schools in this program are matched with a

school in Spain. Schools can organize a student exchange lasting from two to four weeks, and IBERIA Airlines will provide one free ticket for the mentor teacher for every ten tickets bought by the students. The Program also offers a three to six month student/teacher Exchange Program aimed at middle and high school students and teachers. For this program, an intensive language course is provided prior to the beginning of the school year.

The Language and Culture Assistant Program and the Georgia/Spain Visiting Teachers Program provide schools with the opportunity to have a Spanish Teacher or Teacher Assistant to cooperate on the teaching of Spanish Language and Culture. Georgia teachers may also travel to Spain. While such cultural exchanges are a commendable goal, they are more relevant to foreign language programs than to immigrant Latino students and their families. Similar programs focusing on Mexico or Central America, the origin of the majority of recent immigrants to Georgia, would be more germane to these newly arrived students.

The Georgia Department of Education Innovation Program is authorized through the Quality Basic Education Act of Georgia to fund the development, dissemination and adoption of effective, educational, improvement programs through developmental grants, adoption grants and staff development. One adoption grant of up to $5000 is available to every Georgia public school system each year. Only one of the many programs currently available for adoption using this funding applies to Latinos. This is a program for elementary ESOL and Limited English Proficient students. This program emphasizes teacher understanding of the language acquisition process, and the program supports teachers' day-to-day work with children through 4th grade science and 5th grade social studies curriculum materials. Innovation Program grants may also be used to fund development or certification of new programs, but the types of programs that have been used successfully with Latino children elsewhere in the United States have not yet been certified for use in Georgia.

**Postsecondary Responses**

Postsecondary education programs in Georgia have responded more rapidly to the new demographics than have the programs run by the State Department of Education. Approximately five years ago, the University of Georgia organized and funded the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. The Center, known by its acronym CLACS, has promoted interdisciplinary inquiry into a wide range of related topics. Through the listserve it maintains, CLACS publicizes a variety of university and community events. The Center also funds graduate student travel awards, and organizes conferences, lectures, and an international film series featuring works by Latin American and Caribbean directors.

In Northwest Georgia, Dalton State College has been collaborating with local business leaders for approximately four years to increase the number of ESOL-certified teachers in local schools. The first recorded Mexican immigrants to Georgia came to the Dalton area over twenty years ago as part of a construction crew building a dam. Dalton area schools currently are among the most Hispanic in Georgia, with three school systems that have jumped from near zero to over 50% Hispanic enrollment since 1985.

Dalton State College and the Latino Council co-sponsored a Latino Family Day at the college last summer to raise community awareness of the services the College provides. The College also sponsored, with West Georgia College, a one-week summer program to familiarize Latino students with the college atmosphere. This spring, Dalton State College is beginning to offer ESOL certification courses through Web-based distance learning.

In central North Georgia, Gainesville College has for the past two years offered the Summer High School ESOL Project. This program, held at the College, exposes high school students to the college environment while they earn 1/2 Carnegie Unit toward graduation. Nearly 100 students have successfully completed this program to date.

The Gainesville College Department of Continuing Education offers ESL classes to potential students who are not enrolled due to lack of English proficiency. Several students

who are now enrolled at the College have qualified for admission through these classes, and demand is increasing rapidly.

Gainesville College also oversees the Lyman Hall reading program. This program matches volunteer college students with 2nd and 3rd grade Latino children. By reading aloud, the college students improve their Spanish reading and speaking skills while the younger students get valuable exposure to the written word. Some of these programs have originated with the Hispanic community in Dalton, while others have originated with the College. Cooperation between the community and College has been common.

North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU) in conjunction with the Regional Education Services Agency offers all three ESOL certification classes for teachers as a summer institute. This spring they have begun offering these courses online as well. NGCSU has also started a program that seeks to encourage 5th graders to become interested in teaching, through training and practice teaching students in younger grades. Gainesville College and NGCSU have collaborated with each other and the Washington, DC–based Center for Applied Linguistics to establish a web-based Virtual Resource Center that makes available information and mini-lessons related to ESOL teaching (http://troy.gc.peachnet.edu/www/human/esol/index.htm).

Departments within the University of Georgia have developed ongoing two-way teacher exchange programs with the University of Veracruz, Mexico. The Elementary Education Department and the Department of Social Work as well as the UGA Office of International Development are participants in these efforts. Both departments also post student interns to a local Hispanic community center.

Most recently, participants from the Georgia colleges and universities listed above, in collaboration, have received funding for the Latino Pilot Project. The pilot projects funded within this grant seek to increase the number of ESOL certified teachers (focusing both on teachers and on undergraduate teaching majors) and to provide support and information for promoting postsecondary education among Latino parents and public school students.

These pilot projects are just getting under way at this time, but momentum is clearly building.

**Florida: Gifted Education and the Law**

Nearly a decade ago, Florida gifted identification policies were the subject of a lawsuit because they were perceived as discriminatory toward non-White students. This matter was settled out of court when Florida adopted a two-tier gifted identification process. Before the settlement, an IQ score two standard deviations or more above the mean qualified a student as gifted (Stephens & Karnes, 2000). This definition, plus the demonstrated need for a special program and possession of a majority of characteristics of gifted students according to a standard scale or checklist, is still in use.

The second identification path, added for the settlement, pertains only to students from groups currently under-represented in gifted education programs. Under-represented, in this context, means other than White non-Hispanic. It also includes students whose background is limited English proficient or low socioeconomic status. In this path, students must meet "the criteria specified in an approved school district plan for increasing the participation of under-represented groups in programs for gifted students" (Stephens & Karnes, 2000, p. 225). This approach has the apparent effect of shifting responsibility for program equity from the state to the district level. Although such a shift could promote appropriate local solutions, it may also decrease accountability unless a monitoring framework (such as the one in Alabama) is simultaneously put into place.

The new criteria appear headed toward legal action once again. A lawsuit has been filed in Tampa challenging the new standards, and a countersuit has been filed in support of the earlier settlement. Some details of the case challenging the settlement have not been made public at this time. The suit in support of the dual-path policy is backed by a broad coalition of organizations including the NAACP, LULAC, and groups representing Haitian, Puerto Rican, and other interested groups.

Although the Florida policy was changed to increase the participation of students from underrepresented groups, some members of these groups feel that state and local personnel have not made a priority of implementing the changes. From this perspective, gifted education programs are perceived as a means of creating a public school alternative for White students who would otherwise depart for private schools.

**Discussion**

The three states described above differ significantly in Hispanic population. In overall percentage of the population, Alabama is only 1.7% Hispanic while Georgia is 5.3% and Florida 16.8%. In essence, each state's numbers differ by a factor of three. The states also differ by when their Hispanic population arrived; Florida got a substantial boost in the 1950s and 1960s from Cuba, and more recently from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. By contrast, Georgia and Alabama Latinos are predominantly Mexican in background and have mostly arrived during the past decade.

Despite these population differences, state policy responses have been remarkably similar in some ways. Within gifted education, all three states have expanded identification criteria to increase the participation of students from groups underrepresented under previous rules that emphasized IQ test scores. Florida and Alabama policies changed under threat of legal action, while Georgia policy changed without such pressure.

Both Florida and Alabama have implemented a dual pathway into programs for the gifted. A key difference between the Alabama identification matrix and the Florida alternative path is that the Alabama procedure does not specifically apply to minority students. This difference will likely insulate the Alabama policy from the legal troubles that have beset the Florida approach. The Georgia multiple criteria for identification are similar to the Alabama matrix in allowing for the use of rating scales and performance evaluation in some domains.

Despite the promising gifted identification policy changes in all three states, the real measure of success will be whether the changes are successful in including more minority

students in gifted education programs. Since in gifted education the people who make policy are not often the ones affected by its success or failure at identifying minority students, legal action may remain a viable response to inequity.

DOE programs outside gifted education in Georgia and Alabama have been much less responsive. Again, few of the decision makers have firsthand experience with the needs of new arrivals to the United States. Despite their high numbers in some locales, Hispanics in these states have less political power than elsewhere in the United States (in large part because as non-US citizens the majority are not eligible to vote). As a result, no programs are evident at the Alabama DOE and the few Georgia programs are little better. Given that few immigrants come to Georgia from Spain, it is clear that programs like the teacher and student exchange with Spain were not designed with Georgia Latinos in mind. The one other Georgia DOE program is for those learning English in the elementary years. There are no programs apparent for dual language immersion, for gifted or highly able Latino students, or for teacher or student exchange with Spanish speaking countries outside of Spain.

Postsecondary programs originating in state colleges and universities show the most promise for contributing to the relationship between Hispanics and public education. These programs, such as the PACERS initiative in Alabama and the Latino Pilot Project in Georgia, are far more dynamic and much quicker to respond to demographic shifts than are the DOE programs. Fortunately, these programs are in a position to influence those who will make state policy in the future. Significantly, three of the four Latinos I have encountered during the research for this paper are academics. The fourth works in a state DOE position, but not at a level sufficient to influence policy. This observation may help explain why academic programs have had a greater influence: There are not enough Latinos in state departments of education, but their numbers are somewhat greater in higher education. It may also be the case that the organizational structure of academia is more favorable toward innovation and change than is the structure of state education departments,

although this is a matter for future research to consider. Certainly academic institutions have the ability to approach a situation from multiple perspectives (e.g., preservice and continuing teacher education; community outreach; and student preparation and recruitment, to name a few) that together are broader in scope than the focus of a single state agency.

Interestingly, the highest level of community involvement seems to be present where the Hispanic populations are the lowest, in Alabama. Latino activity is high in Florida as well, but it seems more focused into national rather than local organizations. It is possible that looking at demographics on the local level would shed light on this phenomenon; perhaps the Latino community is more highly segregated at the local level in Alabama than is the case elsewhere, leading to greater local densities of participants. It is also possible that there are more organizations in Georgia but that they lack an umbrella group under which to unite. At any rate, the ten Hispanic community organizations that make up the ALAS group in Alabama are many more that the three such organizations of which I am aware in Georgia.

Interactions between education policy and Hispanics are more a two-way street than was expected, although there is still much room for improvement. State responses remain primarily unidirectional, while postsecondary actions by comparison have been much more open to input from the community. Latinos in the Southeast seem to have reached a critical mass for taking action, particularly in Florida but also to some extent in Alabama and Georgia.

Legal action provides one path by which communities may influence policy. Another gentler (and more long-term) effort would focus on placing more community members in positions with decision-making power.

Future research on this topic should include archival sources such as newspapers and local and state school board meeting minutes. More time should also be spent following up on leads, perhaps including interviews with key decision makers at the state level to investigate the thinking behind the decisions that are (or are not) made. Study of legal

arguments and the genesis of lawsuits like those described above could fill an entire book on their own. It is hoped that the beginning represented by this paper will lead to other fruitful avenues of inquire that ultimately may result in a better education being available for all students.

**Acknowledgments**

The author would like to express appreciation to Dr. Sally Krisel, Gifted Education Specialist for the State of Georgia, for her assistance in this project. Thanks is also offered to the many people who provided information or suggested additional contacts: Wanda Heath, John Merritt, Hernán Prado, Sherry Reynolds, Peter Roos, Dr. Fausto Sarmiento, Dr. Robert Seney, and Sarah Worthington. Gratitude is expressed to AERA and the Spencer Foundation for their financial support during this year, enabling me to devote energy to this paper and its presentation, and to the College of Education and the Graduate School of UGA for their support of my presence at the AERA annual meeting.

**Appendix A**: Query posted to BILING and NASAG listserves.

I am seeking information about state and local educational policy responses, particularly in gifted education, to the recent increases in the Latino student population in the Southeast. I'm looking for data from GA, SC, NC, AL, MS, LA, TN, and KY from the past 15 years. Personal experience or published material would be welcome. Please reply to me personally unless it is of general interest to list members.
Thank you,

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